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ABSTRACT

Indiana's youth workers are highly motivated, well-educated, experienced, and satisfied with their jobs. They cite these three top challenges of their jobs: funds, family support, and sufficient staff to share time-consuming duties. Researchers cite these key components to develop first-rate programs that meet youth needs: low staff-student ratio, strong involvement of families, effective partnerships within the community, and high-quality staff members. The Indiana Youth Institute has resources for the following: (1) to help youth workers raise funds and increase salaries by providing relevant training, grants for continuing education, and professional consultation in nonprofit management, fund raising, program evaluation, and technology; (2) to expand efforts to educate parents and community members about benefits of healthy youth development and importance of adult involvement in children's lives; and (3) to alleviate youth workers' workload by providing information, resources, and training to help them work more efficiently. Next steps to improvement are to create more training and technical assistance opportunities to enhance the effectiveness and boost the confidence of youth workers; provide training in software applications and Internet use, and technical assistance geared to each organization's unique technology challenges; improve benefit packages for youth workers; and find new ways to educate parents about the value of youth programming and how it can be enhanced by their willingness to collaborate and participate. (YLB)

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Issue Brief
Fall 2002

Youth Workers Cite Funding As Top Concern

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The Indiana Youth Institute

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Issue Update
Fall 2002
The Indiana Youth Institute
Serving those who work with youth
www.iyi.org
603 E. Washington St., Suite 800 • Indianapolis, IN 46204

Youth Workers Cite Funding As Top Concern

FIRST, THE GOOD NEWS

Most Indiana youth workers are content in their jobs and tend to focus more on the rewards rather than the challenges of their profession. They are encouraged by research that confirms that youth who participate in effective community-based youth programs achieve at higher academic levels than non-participating youth, expect to complete high school and attend college, demonstrate self-confidence and optimism about the future, and express a strong sense of civic responsibility.[1]

Aware of these facts, youth workers say they are motivated by the opportunities that their jobs afford them to "make a difference in a child's life" and "see kids succeed."

Comments such as these, collected as part of IYI's 2002 Youth Worker Study, are confirmed by actions. The typical Hoosier youth worker is a college graduate who has been involved in the profession for at least 8 years and is willing to work long hours for modest compensation. More than 20 percent admit that their average week stretches beyond 50 hours, and more than half of them say that they juggle responsibilities that range from program planning to budget management and from fund raising to marketing.

Table 1: Who are Indiana's Youth Workers?

Who are Indiana's Youth Workers?

The Typical Youth Worker in Indiana

NOTE: Shading indicates variables in which administrative and direct service workers differ

Administrative Youth Workers	Direct Service Youth Workers
Works full-time	Works full-time
Spends 14 percent of his/her time working directly with youth	Spends 64 percent of his/her time working directly with youth
Has been in the current job for 4 years	Has been in the current job for 3 years
Has been in the youth work field for 15 years	Has been in the youth work field for 8 years
Has held 4 jobs in youth work	Has held 3 jobs in youth work
Has either a Bachelor's or Master's degree in social/human services or education	Has either a Bachelor's or Master's degee in social/human services or edcuation
Is 47 years old	Is 37 years old
Is female	Is female
Is married	Is married
Is Caucasian	Is Caucasian
Earns $35,000 - $39,999 annually	Earns $25,000 - $29,999 annually
Has attended professional conferences and workshops on youth work during the past year	Has attended professional conferences and workshops on youth work during the past year
Has convenient access to the Internet and e-mail at work	Has convenient access to the Internet and e-mail at work
Has some degree of familiarity with IYI	Has some degree of familiarity with IYI

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The Top 3 Challenges

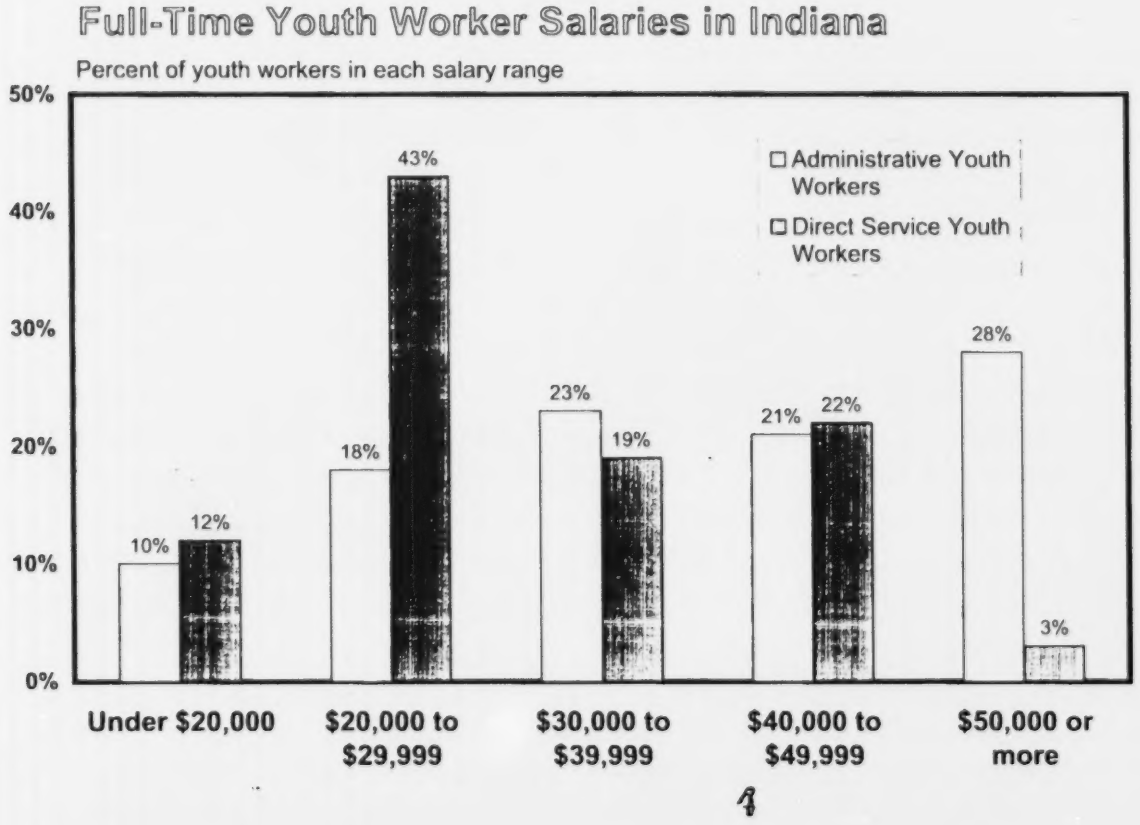
Although youth-serving organizations have made progress on behalf of their employees—many equip staff with technology tools and offer them professional development opportunities and health benefits—several key issues have not been adequately addressed. Asked to identify the top challenges of their jobs, youth workers cite three.

RAISING FUNDS

"Chasing dollars" to pay competitive wages, fund programs and meet general operating expenses is the #1 source of frustration for administrative youth workers and ranks a high second among direct service youth workers. The current median salary range for administrators is under $40,000; the median range for direct service workers is under $30,000.

Although most youth workers have basic health insurance, the range and quality of benefits vary widely. Almost a third of full-time administrators and 20 percent of direct service youth workers in Indiana's smaller counties receive no medical insurance through their jobs. Less than half of all direct service workers have retirement plans provided by their employers.

Figure 1: Full-Time Youth Worker Salaries in Indiana



GENERATING SUPPORT AMONG PARENTS AND FAMILIES

Motivating parents and families to get involved in their children's activities is the major challenge for direct service youth workers, slightly edging out the task of "chasing dollars." Respondents speak of the difficulty of "trying to build a bridge between myself, parents and teachers" and say they encounter a "lack of family unity and support" among the clients they serve.

FINDING TIME TO COMPLETE DIVERSE DUTIES

Trying to meet the various obligations of their jobs within a "normal" workweek is a concern expressed by employees in every area of youth work in Indiana. The majority of the workers spend more than 40 hours a week on the job, and some administrators report workweeks that exceed 50 hours. Activities are diverse, and more than half of survey participants say their responsibilities include planning programs, supervising staff and volunteers, managing budgets, raising funds, writing grant proposals, creating marketing campaigns, and evaluating programs. These duties are in addition to face-to-face work with youth.

The importance of the three issues—funds, family support, and sufficient staff to share time-consuming duties—is verified by research conducted by the U.S. Department of Education. In a 1998 study called "Safe and Smart: Making the after-school hours count for kids," researchers cite several characteristics that are necessary for developing first-rate programs that meet the needs of youth. Among the key components are low staff-student ratio, strong involvement of families, effective partnerships within the community, and high-quality staff members.[2]

Table 2: What do Indiana youth workers do on a day-to-day basis?

What Do Indiana Youth Workers Do on a Day-to-Day Basis?

Activity	Percent of Administrative Youth Workers Responsible for Activity	Percent of Direct Service Youth Workers Responsible for Activity
Face-to-face work with youth	58%	100%
Program planning	93%	93%
Staff and/or volunteer supervision	91%	91%
Program evaluation	90%	88%
Marketing and/or public relations	84%	73%
Budget management	89%	66%
Fund raising and/or grant proposal writing	85%	60%
Other management activities	69%	56%
Board development	61%	38%

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IYI Action Plans

IYI already has some resources in place to help youth workers with these "next steps." This study will help guide our program direction to assist youth workers in areas of greatest need. For example, IYI will:

- Help youth workers raise funds and increase salaries by continuing to provide relevant training, grants for continuing education, and professional consultation in nonprofit management, fund raising, program evaluation, and technology.

- Expand our efforts to educate parents and all community members about the benefits of healthy youth development and the importance of adult involvement in children's lives.

- Alleviate the workload of youth workers by providing information, resources, and training that will help them work more efficiently.

But support for youth work needs to go beyond IYI. If children do better in life when they participate in youth programs, then youth workers need and deserve the support of everyone in the community.

ABOUT THIS STUDY

More than 300 direct service and administrative youth workers participated in the IYI-sponsored telephone survey conducted by Strategic Marketing & Research, Inc., in spring 2002. The respondents represented nonprofit organizations from randomly selected counties representative of Indiana; all were paid professionals; approximately 85 percent were full-time and 15 percent were part-time employees. For a description of the methodology used by researchers in this study and a more detailed review of the findings, call (800) 343-7060.

[1] McLaughlin, M.W. (2000). "Community Counts: How youth organizations matter for youth development." Public Education Network: Washington, D.C.

[2] United States Department of Education (1998). Safe and Smart: Making the after-school hours count for kids. U.S. Department of Education: Washington, D.C.

Implications

The "snapshot" of Indiana's youth work profession, provided by this year's survey, depicts a workforce that is highly motivated, well educated, experienced and satisfied with their jobs. It also indicates areas of concern and identifies several "next steps" toward improvement. As examples:

Although almost half of youth workers have bachelor's degrees and 32 percent have earned master's degrees or doctorates, the most prevalent academic fields of study are social work, counseling and education. These are areas that prepare persons to interact with youth but may not equip them with the skills to handle the time-consuming tasks of fund raising, marketing, human resources, and budget management. As a youth worker's responsibilities increase, so does the need for continuous education and professional development. More than 80 percent of survey participants could identify at least one area in which they need training. Among the topics they would like addressed at workshops and seminars are: fund raising, grant proposal writing, staff supervision, time management, counseling troubled teens, handling issues related to cultural diversity, and supporting youths who are affected by divorce and other stress-inducing situations.

Next step: Create more training and technical assistance opportunities to enhance the effectiveness and boost the confidence of youth workers. These opportunities should include the development of pragmatic skills that are relevant to youth workers' often-fragmented workdays.

Youth workers have made great strides in bridging the digital divide. More than 90 percent now report that they have convenient access to computers, e-mail, and the Internet at work. Yet many say they lack the training in how to use this technology, making simple tasks more time-consuming and limiting their effectiveness in fund raising, program delivery, and nonprofit management.

Next step: Provide training in software applications and how to use the Internet, and technical assistance geared toward each organization's unique technology challenges.

The typical youth worker in Indiana has been in the profession from 8 to 15 years. This longevity suggests that youth workers view their jobs as long-term careers rather than entry-level jobs that will lead them into other professions. Yet, the majority of youth-serving agencies do not offer retirement plans. The lack of such plans supports the idea that youth work is a short-term rather than a long-term commitment. Failure to provide certain benefits such as pension plans also may discourage males from entering the workforce and may be one reason that men make up only one-third of the profession.

Next step: Improve the benefit packages offered to youth workers.

Almost 25 percent of direct service youth workers say that getting parents to participate in their children's lives is the most frustrating aspect of their job. This lack of support from the home undermines any growth or development that can take place within a youth-serving program. Young people need consistency in the messages they receive, the lessons they learn, and the behavior they see modeled by the adults who influence their lives. Collaboration between adults in the home and in the youth-serving agency is essential. The ripple effect: Youth workers who are frustrated by the lack of parental support often feel they are under-appreciated in general. This can lead to general job dissatisfaction that can adversely affect job performance.

Next step: Find new ways to educate parents about the value of youth programming and how it can be enhanced by their willingness to collaborate and participate.

Other Indiana Youth Institute Resources
Questions? 800-343-7060 or www.iyi.org

IYI WEEKLY UPDATE

- A quick, no-cost source of relevant reports, policy updates, grant tips, and other easy-to-read, useful information read by over 8,000 youth workers each week.

IYI'S WEB SITE - WWW.IYI.ORG

- A growing source of reliable information to youth workers, including new reports, county data on Indiana youth, and IYI's entire catalog of library materials that can be borrowed online.

YOUTH SERVICE HELP LINE

- (877) IYI-TIPS, a toll-free number for youth workers to get free professional fund development and legal advice by phone.

AFFORDABLE TRAINING

- Training on fund raising, marketing, working with children, and other topics of interest to youth workers, held in various locations around the state.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT GRANTS

- Up to $750 awarded to youth workers to attend courses, conferences, or workshops of their choice.

IYI ASSESSMENT TEAM

- Provides customized program evaluation tools and professional consultation to youth organizations for only $10 an hour.

TECHWIZARDS

- A partnership with Indiana colleges that provides trained student TechWizards to assist with technology and tech planning for only $10 an hour.

YOUTH SERVICE BRIEFCASE

- Face-to-face professional consultation on fund raising and such nonprofit management issues such as strategic planning, board development, marketing, and volunteer recruitment, for only $10 an hour.

KIDS COUNT CO-OP

- An evolving service that offers substantial discounts on products and services.

For more services, visit www.iyi.org!

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Serving those who work with youth

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